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THE ARCHITECTURAL LEAGUE OF NEW YORK

TWENTY-EIGHTTH
ANNUAL EXHIBITION



MCMXIII





Decoration in Dome of Wisconsin State Capitol
By Edwin H. Blashfield

ARCHITECTURAL LEAGUE OF NEW YORK

THE casual visitor to the exhibition of the Architectural League of New York, which closed on Washington's Birthday, must have been impressed on first view with the variety of objects displayed—whether favourably or not would be a matter of taste. Picturesque, in a general way, the exhibition was. And yet, when all is said about it, it was in detail a conglomeration of the good, bad, indifferent, and simply foolish. Nearly all exhibitions are this. Very few rise above what may be called a fair artistic average—one reason why, the smaller an exhibition can be made, the less deadly it is. Points of colour interest were given to the show in question by the pictorial element. But here again was the old conglomeration, with the usual proportion of senseless nudes thrown in. Nothing is more meaningless and insipid than what might be called the forced nude in art. Too many nymphs, being discovered by satyrs, and insufficiently clad for the winter, make an impression of the extremely foolish and futile.

An architectural exhibit presupposes architecture on view. But the exhibitions of the League comprehend everything from the outside of a structure to what goes into it. In this exhibition there was everything from a house to the book-plate that goes into the book that is in the house. If such comprehensiveness seems straining a point, it must be borne in mind that the exhibitions of the Architectural League

of New York are planned to show, not simply one art, but a co-ordination of the arts, such as is worked out in the Avery prize competition, in which an architect, a sculptor and a decorator, all three on an equal footing, work together to produce one subject. This year the problem in competition was for the end wall of a waiting-room in a railroad station, with a monumental clock. It was won by Kenneth M. Murchison, architect; Charles Sarka, painter; and Leo Lentelli, sculptor.

What prompted this collaborative, competitive prize was the knowledge that in the great days of art an architect was often a painter and a sculptor as well. Thus, a Michael Angelo or a Jean de Boulogne were three in one—that is, each represented within himself three arts, whereas, with the cheapening of art, there grew up a habit of specialising that has changed the old order of three in one to one in three—it taking today three people to produce what in the high tide of art could be wrought by one.

This Avery prize, calling for the co-ordination of several arts in the production of one object, was founded to bring into play again the co-operation and co-ordination that should exist in work of artist and architect. The Architectural League of New York is believed to be the first body and possibly still the only body to offer such a prize and the first organization of its kind to apply the principle of co-ordination to

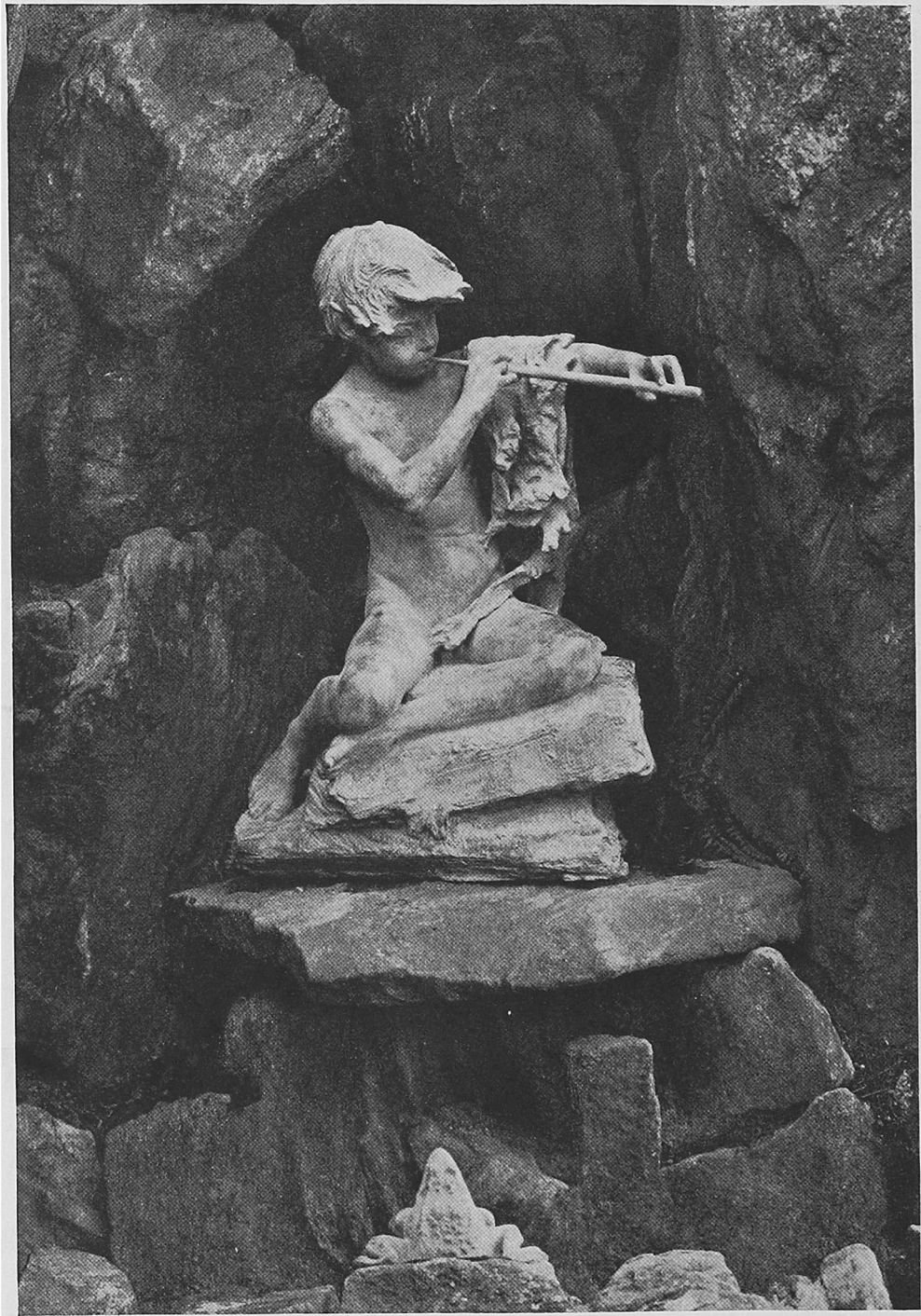
its exhibitions. This principle applied, to annual displays, has attracted attention elsewhere and has led to inquiry even from abroad. It is this principle of co-ordination, the striving of the League, through its exhibitions, to illustrate the co-operation of the arts, that so much differentiates its exhibitions from those of other societies. And while the casual visitor is apt to regard the exhibition as a whole, as a mere conglomeration of varied objects, it is, in fact, a purposely selected variety of art products illustrating the theory upon which the League proceeds in organising its exhibitions.

Whatever criticism may be passed upon the show, the League has in recent years aimed at developing the picturesque side of its displays. Gradually the ground-plan drawings which were meaningless to the lay visitor were weeded out. For this there was a substitution of perspective drawings with an increasing amount of mural decoration and sculpture, and this year there are, indeed, even frames of book-plates and some small decorative hardware. Also in making a display of their perspective drawings the architects have avoided the rows of drawings that had too white or blank an appearance, on account of the broad white margins, and they either have cut down the margins or used gray and brown mounting boards.

Yet, the show could be improved very much more. The number of photographs allowed to be exhibited should be greatly curtailed. It appears as if the number of photographs had greatly increased during the last few years and some parts of the display look almost like a photographic salon.

It seems that sometime ago there was held abroad a very successful exhibition of photographs of American skyscrapers. The point has been lost sight of, however, that the exhibition was a success, not on account of the photographs, but on account of the skyscrapers, which then were novelties abroad. Any argument, that, because architectural photographs had made a hit abroad, they could be used here, is, for the reason given, erroneous. It is simply a matter of trouble and expense for the architect who is now showing photographs, to have a handsome water-color perspective drawing made, placing on the wall of the exhibition a work which is intelligible and interesting, both from the architectural and pictorial point of view, and is not simply a photograph of a city house or country residence.

It is most unfortunate that the photograph also has been adopted by the mural painters and that so many utterly futile photographs of mural paintings were displayed. Mr. Blashfield, indeed, showed his decoration for the trophy room of the gymnasium in the Mercersburg Academy, and entitled "The Victor;" and also a drawing for his decoration of the dome of the State Capitol of Wisconsin. His other exhibits, however, were photographs which would show up well in a catalogue or a magazine, but do not decorate the wall of an art exhibition. This is even more true of Hugo Ballin's display of his decorations for the State Capitol of Wisconsin. Mr. Ballin exhibits twenty photographs. This artist, however, is a fine colorist, a follower of art of the early Florentine school, an American artist who studied



Fountain for the Rockefeller Gardens, Pocantico Hills, N. Y.

Janet Scudder, sc.

in Italy, and is not afraid of paint, because he knows how to use it. What an unhappy difference there is between the original mural work of such an artist and photographs of it. Why should not the League insist that a mural decorator, who wishes to exhibit, should include among the photographs which he sends in, at least one colour sketch of fair size; although it would be still better if photographs were absolutely excluded.

From the fact that the Blashfield and Ballin decorations go to Wisconsin and that much of the other work displayed is also for the West, that section of the country is evidently making great progress in the artistic co-ordination of work in its public buildings. There is, however, a very important piece of decorative work going on in this city—the decoration of the Paulist Fathers' Church, the carrying out of the entire decorative scheme as regards murals, sculptures and glass being under the general direction of William Laurel Harris, who is himself contributing several important details, although, he also has had artists like the late John La Farge working under him. Mr. Harris happily has avoided the photograph. His six contributions to the exhibition are in colour. As to the scholarship and tradition which is pervading the work being done under his direction, it is sufficient to note that a "Liturgy of Angels" will fill the entire sanctuary. To this liturgy John La Farge contributed "The Angel of the Moon," and among other decorative details shown by Mr. Harris and worked out in full liturgical detail is a brilliant "Angel of the Sun."

Some of the work displayed in the

League exhibition frankly is for sale; and some of it is purely pictorial and without the decorative element that co-ordinates with architecture. It can be argued, however, and with reason, that in an exhibition which includes book-plates, a picture is equally in place, even if it is just a picture without any claim to mural decoration. But this once admitted, the League could include an entire National Academy within its shows, which obviously is impracticable. Therefore it should exclude the mere picture entirely, and, so far as a distinct pictorial element is concerned, confine this strictly to mural decoration. But even so, there should be no decorations that are for sale in the exhibition, which should be a display of completed or commissioned work.

It has been mentioned that, with some trouble and expense, architects, instead of showing uninteresting photographs, could make a display of handsome perspective drawings. Complete models also would be highly interesting, but it is obvious that, were there too many of these, the exhibition, on its purely architectural side, would degenerate into the general aspect of a toy-village. But, here and there, a table or shelf, with a completely modelled house, might project from the wall and with excellent effect. The same implies to interiors. In fact, the collaborative prize competition contains a hint as to how an interior, or a wall or section thereof, can be effectively exhibited; while, as to the general impressiveness of a well executed model of a fine piece of work, nothing could show better how well worth while it is to make a display that way, than the su-

perbly worked up model of the "Perry Memorial" at Put-in-Bay, Lake Erie. The memorial is the work of J. H. Freedlander and A. D. Seymour, Jr., and is a beautiful, dignified and appropriate piece of public art-architecture. How much better—both for the spectator and the architect—is a handsome model like this, than photographs such as may be found in the ordinary magazine of architecture or country life.

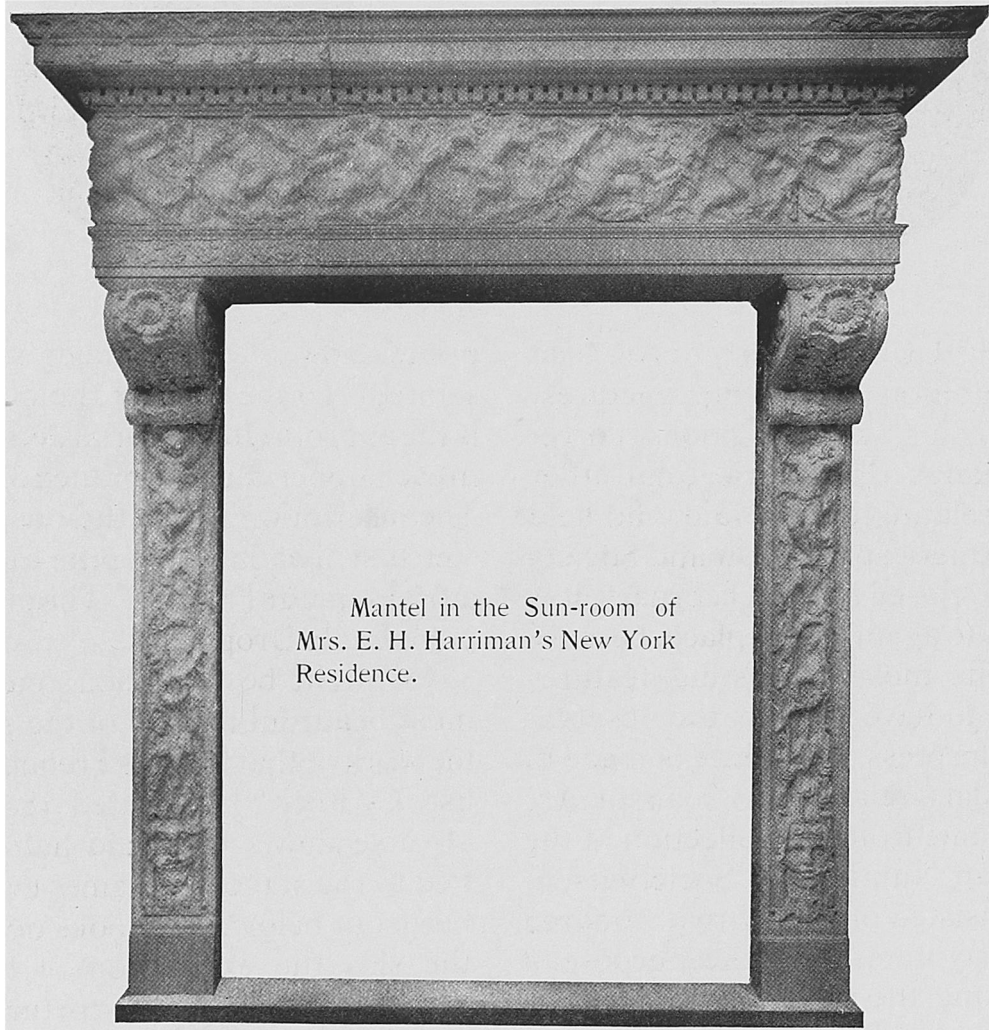
Among other works of sculpture shown are Daniel C. French's Kingsley memorial, Mr. Lukeman's "Spirit of the Lotus Flower," and a fountain by Janet Scudder for John D. Rockefeller's country estate at Pocantico Hills. This fountain, set in the rocks, depicts a boy on a large flat stone and blowing on a pipe. The water, splashing over the youngster, is spouted up by a huge frog that sits on a rock in front of and below the figure. It is understood that this is but one of several fountains executed for the same estate and that there is to be a large grotto with figures, sculptured by Emil Siebern, acting in collaboration with W. W. Bosworth, architect.

To revert to the League, however, A. A. Weinman has executed for Detroit a statue of William Cotton Maybury, a noted Mayor of that city. Work by Karl Bitter, for the Jefferson Memorial, in St. Louis, represents the signing of the Louisiana Purchase treaty. There are Hermon A. MacNeil's Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial for Albany and the sculptured staircase by Charles Keck for the stairway in the Albany State Education Building. The most

creditable exhibits in the work shown by the American Academy in Rome are the sculptures by Paul Manship. They are pseudo-classic; but when the young sculptor rids himself of the influence of modern Roman pseudo-classicism and finds himself, his studies in classic art will have furnished him with desirable fundamentals in technique.

Features among the architectural exhibits include McKim, Mead & White's new Post Office building at Thirty-third street and Seventh avenue; Arnold W. Brunner's Stadium drawings; Donn Barber's drawings of the Cotton Exchange and the headquarters and Training School Building of the Young Women's Christian Association; Grosvenor Atterbury's headquarters for the Russell Sage Foundation and Hunt & Hunt's drawings for Castlegould.

The League publishes a handsome catalogue. For several years the title page has had as decoration the pilasters of a mantelpiece executed by A. Stirling Calder for the sun room in the New York residence of Mrs. E. H. Harriman. These pilasters are reproduced in the special title-design made for this article on the League. The entire work is shown on the next page. The design is cleverly based on the tale of "Jack and the Bean-stalk." At the base of the pilasters are the heads of a giant and giantess masked. Growing from these are the beanstalks. Bean-form and sunflower decorations are carried through the entire scheme, with numerous children—Jacks and Jills—playing at hide and seek among the leaves and flowers.



Mantel in the Sun-room of
Mrs. E. H. Harriman's New York
Residence.

A. Stirling Calder, sc.